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FOR D AND AF FROM P/DAS RANNEBERGER

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SUBJECT: DARFUR - RHETORIC AND REALITY OF A COMPLEX CONFLICT

Classified By: AF PDAS Michael Ranneberger. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The prevailing rhetoric on Darfur conveys the gravity of the humanitarian crisis, but does not capture the complexity of the changing situation on the ground. Though the violence emerged as a result of the political conflict between the GOS and the Darfur rebels, it had a ready base in traditional conflicts between Arab nomads and sedentary African tribes. Local factors are important, and the lines are not always clearly drawn between African and Arab tribes. The African Union is taking an impressive pro-active approach; its presence is directly responsible for the diminishing of large-scale organized violence since January. Expansion of the AU to more areas quickly is vital to maintain momentum. The AU can do more within its existing mandate, but more forces and heavier armament are needed. The AU still faces significant logistical constraints. Steps to address these underway now should pave the way for expansion to begin in June. The AU wants help in this process from the U.S., EU, NATO, and UN. The GOS is continuing to provide support to the jinjaweed, though not through direct involvement in attacks. Violence is continuing. The jinjaweed have attacked some villages and may be massing for action against a rebel stronghold located near an AU operating base. Rebel commanders claimed they are complying with all agreements, but virtually admitted attacking humanitarian workers and convoys because, they argued, the GOS is blocking humanitarian assistance to their areas. They said they are in daily contact with their leaders outside of Darfur and would support whatever decision is made to return to the political talks. Tribal reconciliation will not drive the political process. Working on this now, however, will pave the way for eventual implementation of a political settlement. Tribal leaders believe that traditional relationships can be reconstituted once there is peace and they return to their native villages. They will then work out compensation and land usage issues. I followed up on Darfur issues in Addis Ababa with AU Chairperson Konare and his team, and in Brussels with the EU (septels). End summary.

12. (SBU) During April 15-17, following the Deputy Secretary's visit to Sudan, I visited by helicopter six

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operating bases of the African Union in northern, southern, and western Darfur; talked with rebel field commanders; met with non-governmental groups; held discussions with local tribal leaders; and talked with the Sudanese government's military commander for Darfur. Taiya Smith of the Sudan Programs Group and U.S. Army Liaison Ron Capps organized the visit and provided invaluable support. The U.S. military observers have forged close working relationships with the AU that help energize AU efforts. Stationing additional U.S. military observers and advisors now and as the AU expands is key to drive the process.

The African Union's Pro-active Approach

13. (C) At the six AU bases (at Muhajiriyah, Nyala, El Fasher, Kutum, Zalingei, Nertiti) we found an activist approach. The AU commanders are generally impressive, with competent teams. They are well-briefed on the situation in their areas of responsibility, demonstrating an appreciation of local tribal realities. They have detailed information on the positions of the rebels, government forces, and Arab militias. The commanders showed a good understanding of the AU mandate. In addition to monitoring of the rebel-GOS ceasefire and carrying out timely investigations of incidents, they are engaged in outreach to local communities and their traditional leaders. They meet with local GOS and rebel commanders, and say they are generally cooperating with the AU. AU commanders also have contacts with the Arab militias where possible. The AU commanders and forces appear disciplined, and their camps have been well-constructed by the U.S. contractor PAE, often under enormous time pressure. (The fact that many of these AU troops are well-experienced in peacekeeping missions is reflected in their quality of life demands, like excessive requirements for bottled water!) All the AU commanders and staff with whom I met expressed enormous appreciation for U.S. assistance.

14. (C) The AU commanders understand the central importance of their role in helping stop violence. They are deploying their military observers and protection forces in patrols to towns and villages within their areas of responsibility; patrolling roads; and visiting camps of internally displaced persons. The presence of the AU in the areas we visited has constrained violence. The AU commanders generally want to do more, and are frustrated by logistical impediments. (In one case the AU learned of jinjaweed abduction of 8 women from an IDP camp. They pursued the group and the women were released when the jinjaweed fled.) The base at Muhajiriyah, for example, has 130 troops and 13 military observers, but only 4 vehicles and one Thuraya phone. At many of the bases vehicle and base station radio frequencies are incompatible. (VSAT and internet communications were also initially disrupted due to introduction of viruses caused by the downloading of pornography at a number of the AU bases; the AU command cracked down and this is no longer a major problem.) Logistical difficulties limit the number of patrols that can be sent out to cover hundreds of square miles. As a result, one still sees some troops lying in their tents in the middle of the day with nothing to do. Each of the 8 AU sectors in Darfur has access to helicopters, and these are used for reconnaissance and patrolling, in addition to providing logistical support for AU bases.

15. (SBU) The AU is sensitive to the need to help facilitate humanitarian access. They are developing close liaison with UN agencies and non-governmental groups to share information on the security situation and to offer assistance. In some cases, the AU is escorting humanitarian convoys. However, in most cases, the humanitarian organizations do not want to be directly associated with the military. Consequently, the AU either patrols the road before the convoy departs, or places a patrol a short distance in front of the convoy.

16. (SBU) The AU is also occupying villages if information is developed that an attack may be imminent. U.S.-provided fly-away kits facilitate quick AU reaction. The AU cannot do this in all cases due to the limited size of the mission and logistical problems.

17. (C) Progress is being made in addressing logistical issues, and command and control problems. Some of the recommendations of the recent EU/US/UN/AU Joint Assessment Mission have already been implemented. The AU has agreed on the need to establish a planning cell in Khartoum responsible to AU Special Representative Kingibe, and the AU has identified a candidate to be a new deputy to Kingibe, who will be responsible for ensuring coordination in Darfur. These steps now and over coming weeks are essential to facilitate expansion of the AU mission to 7,447. The AU expects the expansion to be approved at the end of April and hopes to have additional personnel on the ground beginning in June.

18. (C) The recent addition of civ-pol elements to each of the AU sites, as the mission continues to expand, holds promise. The civ-pol are just starting to monitor the activities of the GOS police, particularly with respect to investigations of rapes and other abuses against civilians. However, we found the civ-pol teams not properly trained for this work and not sensitized to the local context in which the GOS police are in fact part of the problem. The AU recognizes the need for training and is working with the UN, the UK, and Canada (all of whom have offered to train the civ-pol) to increase civ-pol capacity.

19. (C) AU commanders were frank in discussing the limits of what they can do. Several commanders pointed out that AU units do not have the heavy weaponry that would be necessary to react should an AU base be attacked or should the AU find itself in immediate proximity to an attack on a village or convoy. They believe their existing mandate enables them to be even more active. Commanders pointed out, for example, that if they are stopped by a rebel roadblock or jinjaweed group, all they can do is try to persuade the groups to let them pass. Their preferred approach would not be to ask permission. They believe that patrols with heavier weaponry (with battalion-sized units at AU operating bases) would not be challenged, would strengthen AU credibility as a deterrent, and would bolster morale.

Violence Reduced in Scope But Continuing

110. (SBU) Those Arab militias referred to as the "jinjaweed" have not stopped burning villages, but they do so more sporadically, and not in areas where the AU is present. Flying over Darfur, I saw many burned and abandoned villages, but also many villages still occupied, some with cultivation evident. The diminishment in large-scale, systematic destruction has occurred not so much because all villages have been destroyed, but because the AU acts as a deterrent

where it is present. That said, the jinjaweed militias remain very active, particularly in southern Darfur, where there are now few rebel strongholds remaining. AU commanders and NGO representatives associated most of the violence with either GOS-supported jinjaweed or the rebels, but also said that there are growing indications of some banditry not associated with either. The AU provided details of attacks by the rebels and jinjaweed.

11. (C) The spotlight that the AU sheds on Darfur coupled with international pressure has caused the GOS to cease use of helicopter gunships and antonov bombers for offensive purposes (there have not been any confirmed attacks involving the use of GOS air assets since January 2005), but it appears that the GOS has not cut ties to the jinjaweed and continues to support these militias. AU commanders and non-governmental observers were emphatic on this point. There is a strong indication that the GOS is using the jinjaweed as a proxy for its own involvement. The local governors, even if they wanted to, have no ability to control the jinjaweed. For example, Tijani, the head of jinjaweed associated with the Misserya tribe, is a prominent personality in Nyala, the capital of southern Darfur, boasts of his activities, and frequently talks to the governor (Wali) of South Darfur. Tijani is viewed locally as significantly stronger than the Wali; both the Wali and the GOS Western Area Commander claim that they cannot control Tijani. The AU has reports of GOS continuing to provide weapons and support for the militias.

12. (SBU) Rapes frequently occur against women, especially when they leave IDP camps to collect firewood. The GOS practice of forcing women to file a police report before being able to receive medical attention continues. The GOS does not investigate these reports, and in a number of cases women have been arrested or have disappeared after filing rape reports.

Revealing Conversation With Western Area Military Commander

13. (C) The Western Area Commander of Darfur sought to portray violence as purely a tribal problem, and emphasized the importance of GOS efforts allegedly to promote tribal reconciliation (i.e. a GOS-orchestrated process run by the Wali). He stressed the need for rebel forces to be cantoned, and claimed that the GOS is determined to control all militia groups. However, in one exchange he admitted that the Misserya tribal group is beyond his control.

14. (C) I found two things the commander said particularly interesting. He told me that Vice President Taha recently met privately with him in Darfur and gave strict instructions not to undertake military offensive actions and to control the militias. In the next breath, however, the commander admitted that the GOS had recruited Arab tribes because black tribes supported the rebels, but the commander then claimed that these Arab tribal recruits are actually now a disciplined part of the GOS military, wearing uniforms and regularly coming in from the field to get supplies. (This tracks with other reports that some of the jinjaweed militias have been loosely incorporated into the Popular Defense Forces.) The GOS appears to have adopted this dual approach of absorbing some of the jinjaweed while claiming that other jinjaweed who commit violence are simply beyond the GOS, ability to control. (An NGO representative with whom I met characterized the Arab militias as a combination of full-time PDF, others more loosely associated as "auxiliaries" to be called upon as needed, and really local militias/bandits not strictly linked to the GOS.)

Rebel Commanders

15. (C) Muhajiriyah, east of Nyala, is one of three rebel strongholds (along with the Jebel Mara mountains in central Darfur, and Jebel Moon in northwest Darfur). I met with the following Sudan Liberation Movement military commanders at Muhajiriyah: Bakhet Abdel Kareem Abdullah, Deputy Commander for the Southern Region; Abdel Majed El Nour, Commander of the Southern Region; Zakeria Arga, Secretary of Information; and Fadel Hussain, Chief of Logistics. The commanders were from three tribes (Fur, Zhagawa, and one other). (With their sunglasses, turbans, and bandoleers, they were right out of central casting.) The rebels appeared well-briefed on the UNSC resolutions and Oslo donors conference. I laid out the U.S. view of the situation in Darfur and emphasized that the rebels are equally liable under the UNSC resolutions if they violate the ceasefire and commit violence. They claimed they respect all the agreements they have signed, yet then said they have no choice but to rob humanitarian supplies since the GOS is blocking humanitarian access to their areas. I explained that we are pushing hard for unrestricted humanitarian access, but that there can be no justification

for attacks on humanitarian workers or convoys.

116. (C) I emphasized the need for the rebels to return to the AU-sponsored political talks with unity of leadership and a realistic negotiating position, and described the meetings Senior Representative Snyder held with rebel leaders in Oslo. The rebels claimed that they are in daily contact with SLM leaders Abdul Wahid and Mini Menawi, among others. They argued that jinjaweed violence should be stopped as a precondition for political talks, but said they would support whatever approach is adopted by their leaders.

117. (C) The rebels and the AU said that jinjaweed have been massing to the west of Mahajiriyah, and that there are indications they plan an imminent assault on this rebel stronghold. They alleged the GOS recently gave jinjaweed leader Tijani 29 vehicles. The AU is closely monitoring the situation. In Darfur and later in Addis I emphasized to the AU the need to disseminate such information on a timely basis so that the U.S. and other international partners can help the AU by weighing in with both sides if major attacks appear imminent.

Tribal Reconciliation

118. (SBU) I explored prospects for tribal reconciliation in all conversations. The AU is developing close contacts with tribal chiefs, Imams, and other community leaders in their areas. In some cases, they have been able use these contacts to prevent greater violence resulting from genuine local disputes -- usually involving theft of cattle. One AU officer described how during an unannounced visit to a village he found African and Arab tribal leaders engaged in a discussion aimed at resolving a local problem.

119. (SBU) A lively meeting with about 100 tribal leaders (Fur, Zhagawa, Messalit) at the IDP camp at Kutum in northern Darfur was enlightening. Many of them have been at the camp for 13 months. They said that their tribal authority remains generally intact, but that traditional structures might break down if they remain in the camp indefinitely. They stressed their desire to return to their native villages, but only once the violence ends and their security is assured. While the tribal leaders did not seem particularly political, they did maintain that the Darfur rebels "are protecting blacks." They repeatedly characterized the violence in Darfur as Arab efforts to remove them from the land and destroy their way of life. One tribal leader made a distinction between black Arabs and white Arabs, and suggested that in places where the two groups appear to be cooperating, the GOS has paid off the black Arabs.

120. (SBU) The tribal leaders said that they believe the traditional contacts they had with Arab chiefs in their native areas can be reconstituted once there is peace, but they see no possibility of doing so until the violence has been stopped. Once there is peace, they said, traditional tribal mechanisms should be used to work out issues related to compensation and usage of the land and water. When pressed, they said that they would be willing to meet with Arab chiefs under AU auspices, but they strongly believe that nothing can be accomplished until the Arab militias are disarmed and there is peace.

121. (C) Representatives of UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs with whom I met also said they believe peace is a prerequisite for developing a meaningful tribal reconciliation process. Neither they nor the AU feel that authentic Arab and black tribal leaders can place serious pressure on the GOS or rebels to stop violence. They maintained that political talks are the only means of achieving peace. Tribal reconciliation will then be key to implementing the peace accord and returning Darfur to normalcy. They agreed that, in this context, encouraging tribal contacts now could be useful.

122. (C) The SLM military commanders with whom we met said that GOS emphasis on the need for "tribal reconciliation" is merely an attempt to go around the political process. They also maintained that the Arab chiefs have been completely compromised by the GOS. They claimed, for example, that about a month ago the GOS Minister of Foreign Trade came to Darfur and paid Arab chiefs to attack several villages in southern Darfur.

Grave Humanitarian Situation

123. (SBU) Representatives of UN agencies and NGOs expressed grave concern regarding the humanitarian situation. One official in southern Darfur said that the UN will soon have to cut rations to one-half or even one-fourth of normal due to insufficient humanitarian supplies being received. He

also described continuing obstacles to achieving full access and discussed the looming danger of famine. The GOS continues to use Arab militias as a means to impede humanitarian deliveries to rebel-controlled areas. He described how 150 trucks carrying supplies are currently stopped south of Nyala by militias extorting money. He and others with whom I spoke, however, warmly praised the AU for its assistance in interceding in such situations, in sharing information, and in providing escorts.

Comment

124. (C) We are on the right track in maintaining pressure on the GOS and rebels, emphasizing the need for specific actions to end violence, supporting political talks, encouraging tribal reconciliation, pressing for unrestricted humanitarian access, and expanding the AU presence in order to protect civilians and end the violence. This approach is changing the situation on the ground in a positive way, though our visit highlighted the enormity of the problem and what remains to be done. Continued vigorous U.S. leadership is essential in terms of resources but also as a catalyst to maintain and strengthen a concerted multilateral effort involving the AU, EU, UN, and others.

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